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Classified By: CDA Cheryl Sim for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) In this edition:

- Annual Government of Rwanda (GOR) Retreat
- Bringing Gacaca to a Close
- End to Canadian Aid for Rwanda
- Journalists Expelled From Police Event
- Japan to Open Embassy in Rwanda

GOR Holds Annual Retreat

12. (C) The Government of Rwanda (GOR) held its sixth annual government retreat February 16-20. President Paul Kagame and senior government officials including Ministers, Parliamentary leadership, Secretaries General, governors, Rwanda's ambassadors, judicial officials and top military and police representatives, as well as foreign nationals working for the GOR attended. The retreat focused primarily on economic issues. The major resolutions to emerge called for Rwanda to free itself from "demeaning" foreign aid dependency in the near future and end the "culture of mediocrity" in the country. Other resolutions addressed the need to improve service delivery and utilize agriculture as a development tool. The President did not use the event as a public opportunity to take to task underperforming GOR officials as he has in previous years. Instead, he apparently directed limited "criticisms" at Prosecutor General Martin Ngoga, telling him to continue to pursue investigations into government corruption cases, as a means signaling his high interest to all those officials present (septel).

13. (C) Comment: The presence of several expatriates working for the GOR may have tempered the sometimes blistering annual criticism proffered by President Kagame. The resolution to end dependence on foreign aid is laudable, but unlikely to be fully achieved anytime in the near future given that foreign assistance currently comprises 50 percent of the GOR budget. End comment.

Gacaca Courts Near End of Cases

¶4. (SBU) On February 24, Denis Bikesha, Director of Training, Mobilization, and Sensitization for the National Service of Gacaca Courts, told PolOffs all gacaca cases, including appeals, were slated to be completed by the end of March 2009. He said as of November 2008, 4000 Category I rape cases were left to be heard by the traditional courts; they had worked to "increase the speed" at which cases were processed since that time. Bikesha said "an independent body" would evaluate the gacaca process at its conclusion and publish a report of findings in December. In the meantime, the number of staff in the gacaca service was being reduced in preparation for the cessation of trials. The Service was planning to establish cooperatives and provide tokens of recognition for former gacaca judges (who numbered 169,442) was underway.

¶5. (SBU) Bikesha emphasized the purpose of the gacaca process was to provide "justice for reconciliation, and to uproot the culture of impunity." When asked about possible preparations to try former FDLR soldiers returning from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) following the recent joint GOR-DRC military operation, Bikesha said many of the returnees had been younger than age 14 during the genocide and would not therefore be subject to trial for genocide crimes. He also therefore be subject to trial for genocide crimes. He also said several individuals had already been tried in absentia. Bikesha said "there is no statute of limitations on genocide," and that genocide trials would continue in the conventional court system as needed even after the termination of the gacaca process.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Though the deadline for completion of cases has been pushed back several times and the law governing gacaca subjected to several revisions, the GOR has accomplished an amazing feat of judicial innovation, adapting the traditional gacaca process to deal with over one million cases stemming from the 1994 genocide. The process has not been free from problems, particularly regarding various due process failings, the corruption of judges by those wishing to escape punishment for their genocide crimes, and worrisome attacks on survivors and witnesses. Nevertheless, its conclusion will help Rwandans close a chapter on their darkest hour, and provides a basis in the future for reconciliation based upon recognition of crimes and acknowledgment of responsibility. True reconciliation will take decades, but the gacaca system provided a first essential step. End comment.

Canada To Stop Bilateral Aid to GOR

¶7. (SBU) On February 23, the Canadian government issued a press release outlining its plan to focus its bilateral foreign aid resources in 20 countries as part of its "Aid Effectiveness Agenda." Rwanda was not among the 20 countries who will receive bilateral aid under the strategy, though the Government of Canada says all existing commitments with the GOR will be met, including ongoing support in the areas of rural development and local government. Multilateral programming will also continue.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: The Canadian decision on bilateral aid to the GOR follows the cessation of direct budget assistance by the Swedish and the Dutch after the publication of the U.N. Group of Experts report on the DRC alleging the GOR had provided support to an armed rebel group there (ref A). The Canadian decision will place additional pressure on the GOR to make every assistance dollar count. End comment.

Police Expel Journalists from Event

¶9. (U) The pro-GOR New Times reported that police expelled two of its journalists from a lecture for Rwanda National Police (RNP) cadets given by High Court President Johnston

Bisengye on interaction between police and the judiciary on February 14. The two had been invited to cover the public event by Bisengye, who unsuccessfully attempted to intervene on their behalf when they were asked to leave. Police refused to allow the reporters to stay at the lecture and forced them to delete the photographs they had taken when they failed to produce a letter of permission from the Ministry of Internal Security.

¶10. (C) George Barya, one of the expelled journalists, confirmed the details, and offered a sympathetic portrayal of Bisengye's efforts to allow them to stay at the training. He said the Minister of Information Louise Mushikiwabo had been informed of the incident. She reportedly gave her assurances that she would raise the issue at the annual GOR retreat, and she would call for better treatment of journalists by GOR officials (note: we have no indication to date she actually raised this issue).

¶11. (SBU) Comment: The expulsion of journalists from an event that included discussion of human rights in policing is another example of the lack of understanding of the importance of optics in dealing with press freedom issues. Importance of optics in dealing with press freedom issues (ref B). However, there are some encouraging signs that the upper echelons of GOR leadership are becoming more understanding of press issues. The intervention of high-level officials on behalf of the New Times' journalists, and the continued publication of critical pieces in independent newspapers without official reaction, are welcome developments. End comment.

Japanese Embassy scheduled for 2010

¶12. (C) As part of its commitment to double overseas development assistance to Africa, the Government of Japan (GOJ) recently announced its intention to open an Embassy in Rwanda in 2010. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Resident Representative Hiroshi Murakami told PolOff on March 4 that Rwanda is a focus country for Japan's assistance efforts. These efforts are based on two "pillars" - support for human development and for rural development, particularly in the water and energy sectors. Murakami said the larger GOJ presence afforded by an embassy in Kigali will allow the GOJ to increase its programming activities in Rwanda. He noted Rwanda was not yet eligible for off-shore loans provided by the Japanese Bank of International Cooperation (which recently merged with JICA), but that changing Rwanda's eligibility was another future goal.

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